

Australia: Labor government pressing ahead with demolition of Melbourne public housing towers

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Following a December ruling by the Victorian Supreme Court, the state Labor government has escalated its campaign to demolish 44 public housing towers in inner Melbourne and hand the land to private developers.

Housing Minister Harriet Shing has announced a second phase, now targeting towers in Albert Park, Flemington, Kensington, North Melbourne, St Kilda and Prahran, adding to two in Richmond and South Yarra already earmarked for destruction.

The first tranche of five included two Carlton towers emptied in 2023 on the pretext that defective sewer stacks were irreparable, and three towers in Flemington and North Melbourne from which over 90 percent of residents have been forced out through an oppressive relocation program.

The newly named seven are part of a group designated for older persons, housing extremely vulnerable elderly residents with many in their eighties and nineties. The announcement underscores the brutality of the demolition program as a whole, and the determination of the Labor government and its agency, Homes Victoria, to press ahead in the face of opposition.

Elderly tenants were blindsided by relocation letters ordering moves from midyear, after being repeatedly told their towers would be the last to be demolished.

Remaining residents in the first tranche now face imminent eviction. Their lawyers are seeking an injunction to prevent notices to quit being served on 30 households in three towers, while they prepare an appeal to the High Court in Canberra. But the legal path has repeatedly failed to protect residents.

A legal challenge has proceeded for more than two years since the Labor government announced the demolitions in September 2023. Residents mounted a class action to block the program, only to be confronted at every stage by Supreme Court judges who sided with Homes Victoria and the state.

The Labor government, emboldened, has stepped up the

onslaught.

In April 2025, Justice Melinda Richards found that, under the Housing Act, Homes Victoria “need not consult with anyone before exercising its powers to manage land,” and declared human rights under the Charter are not absolute, thus effectively subordinating residents’ rights when redevelopment and alleged “legitimate ends” are invoked.

The Court of Appeal’s December 19 decision in *Jason Mallard v Homes Victoria* echoed that hostility: The judges lamented the lack of consultation, yet upheld the decision to demolish as pursuing permissible aims of replacing “end of life” buildings and increasing housing supply on the sites.

In reality, independent architects have demonstrated the feasibility and lower cost of refurbishment. That has been ignored in the judgements, which have covered over the reality that the demolitions are not about increasing public housing supply, but destroying it in the interests of the property developers.

Residents’ lawyers advanced six grounds of appeal, including procedural fairness under the Housing Act, Charter protections (including protection from arbitrary interference with the right to home) and exclusion of hearsay evidence tied to secret cabinet documents. But they were unsuccessful.

One resident who attended the court case told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “They abused us. We didn’t get any consultation. No one consulted us. They knocked on the door and they forced us to sign the papers without knowing what we were signing. So it was unfair.”

On the relationship of the courts to the government, the resident added: “Of course they are working together. You know, after they finish the court, or before they come into the court, they are connected. They all sit together. I’ve been going to court a long time. They have coffee together, they stay together. You know, they are good friends. So how are you going to do bad things to your friends?”

The resident concluded: “Unless we got all the documents,

all the secret papers from cabinet documents, we couldn't win. When we didn't get those, we couldn't go on with everything, so we couldn't succeed, so it was a waste of time."

There is another legal avenue available, which is being pursued through a High Court challenge.

But the progress of the case underscores the futility of relying on the courts to block the demolition.

That line has been advanced by the Greens and pseudo-left groups, such as the Victorian Socialists and Socialist Alliance. Together, they have presented the court challenges, as well as a state parliamentary inquiry that concluded last year, as the primary vehicles for opposing the demolition.

The Greens and the pseudo-left have connected this to claims that the state Labor government can be pressured, through moral appeals and adverse publicity, to abandon the demolitions. As the mounting tally of evictions demonstrates, the opposite is the case. The more opposition is expressed, the more the Labor government doubles down.

The real function of the illusion-mongering of the Greens and the pseudo-left is to politically neuter opposition and subordinate it to the very government carrying out the destruction of the towers. That is of a piece with the political character of these forces.

The Greens collaborate directly with Labor governments, including in Victoria, on various policies. The pseudo-left, notwithstanding their occasional rhetoric, are tied by a thousand threads to the parliamentary establishment, including through their cooperation with the Greens and their integration into a Labor-aligned and corporatised trade union bureaucracy.

An alternative perspective is required if the demolition is to be defeated and homes saved.

That perspective must be not of appealing to the Labor government, but of waging the most determined political fight against it. Labor's assault on the towers is not an aberration. It is a particularly sharp expression of its character as a ruthless party of big business, committed to making the working class pay for a deepening budget deficit and a broader crisis of the capitalist system.

Residents must turn to their fellow workers, not the courts or parliaments. The struggle against the demolition has to be connected to the fight for the broader interests of the working class as a whole, against cuts to wages, the cost-of-living crisis and austerity cuts, including mass public sector sackings by the very same Victorian Labor government.

A particular appeal should be made to construction workers, who will be tasked with directly imposing the demolition, as well as those public sector employees who are being forced to oversee it. There should be a campaign for a

black ban and strikes on any work on the towers, until the entire demolition plan is overturned. Such a struggle can only go forward independently of, and opposed to, the union bureaucracies, which are partners of the Labor government and openly or tacitly back the demolition and its other pro-business policies.

The Neighbourhood Action Committee (NAC) was established by residents last year, with the political assistance of the Socialist Equality Party, to organise such a fight. It has put forward demands for which such a struggle must be fought, including:

- Hands off the towers! Not a single resident to be displaced or forced out of their home! Refurbishment and renovation, not demolition!
- For a massive expansion of public housing! Billions for housing supply, not for big business and the banks!
- Housing is a social right! Every member of society must be entitled to decent quality and affordable housing, as a basic precondition for life.

These demands raise fundamental questions related to the organisation of society. They cannot be met under conditions where every element of social life is subordinated to the insatiable profit drive of the largest corporations and the banks, which dictate government policy.

They raise the need for the expropriation of the banks, the property developers and the construction companies, which make vast fortunes from a housing crisis that produces misery for millions of people. These businesses should be transformed into public utilities, under the democratic control of the working class, as part of a broader transformation of society to meet social need, not profit. That is the fight for socialism.



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